Barrett Strong

Barrett Strong's music has been a cornerstone in the growth of Soul music since 1959, when at 18 he recorded the now-classic "Money (That's What I Want)" for the then-fledgling Motown organization. He then turned to writing songs and became one of the behind-the-scenes figures that was responsible in developing what is now called the "Detroit Sound."

Along with his writing partner at that time, Norman Whitfield, he composed a list of Soul hits that boggles the mind, including almost every major hit the Temptations recorded from 1966-72 (such as "I Wish It Would Rain," "Cloud Nine," "Just My Imagination," "Psychedelic Shack," "Can't Get Next To You," "Runaway Child" and the 1972 Grammy Award winner "Papa Was A Rolling Stone")as well as Marvin Gaye's No. 1 record, "That's The Way Love Is," and what has now become a classic, "I Heard It Through The Grapevine" (one of the best-selling songs of all time).

Barrett, who began singing at the age of five, claims, "I could not live without music. My father was a minister, so I sang in church. Music is peace to me. They're one and the same."

His professional career began a couple of decades ago when singer Jackie Wilson introduced the 15-year-old to Berry Gordy.

"I went over to Gordy's house and he was lying on the couch. I sang for him and he signed me to a contract. Gordy was just getting started then, and we became good friends," Barrett explains.

After writing hundreds of songs for about 15 years, Barrett

finally returned to performing in 1975 with his debut album on Capitol, Stronghold, which was well-received and highly praised for its smooth soulfulness and its batch of new Strong originals written with a new partner, Billy Always.

"I was trying out some new songs for a few friends and my managers down in my basement when one of them said, 'Hey, why don't you sing it yourself?' They'd said that before, but this time it made an impression. It just seemed like the timing was right," says Barrett.

"I actually find it easier writing for myself than for others. I spend a lot of time with myself, getting to know myself better, and then I can set my feelings to music. I know what I can do. With another artist it takes a lot of time just to feel him out," he explains.

Barrett produced Stronghold and played piano on it. Now he has produced and arranged his second Capitol album, Live & Love, which features an entirely new set of musicians(although Thomas Postell returns on one cut) from Jackson, Mississippi, where the recording was done. Barrett wrote three of the tunes alone, one with Billy Always and the title track with Always and Hiriam Hamilton. He also includes a remake of that early chart success, "Money (That's What I Want)", and the standard Steve Cropper-Eddie Floyd song, "Knock On Wood."

"This album," says Barrett, "has a lot different concept. It's more disco oriented, more danceable than the last. The idea is to

forget about what you don't have, forget about the pressures, the bad economy or whatever, and enjoy life...just enjoy yourself. Both 'Man Up In The Sky', which has almost spiritual lyrics, and 'Live and Love' have a universal message: hope for a better world."

Barrett's music will undoubtably make that hope a reality.

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